HOW TO MAKE AUDIENCES LAUGH

By GEORGE HASSELL,
of "Good Morning, Judge."

A LAUGH is described by a standard dictionary as a convulsive sound caused by merriment. Hidden within the one word, convulsive, is the greatest secret of laugh-producing—suddenness, the unexpected. But there are other underlying secrets, and they are numerous and varied. Some one has declared a hearty laugh the rarest experience of man. He is right. Drama is drama the world over; tragedy is tragedy, but comedy is — well, whatever the victim is willing to accept as such. It is the most uncertain commodity that the theatrical manager has to sell. No one has been able satisfactorily to explain the reason. It has neither definite form nor formula, yet, like the piano, one can play anything on it if he know how. Otherwise a mess of discord will be produced.

An example of the problems presented by comedy is found in this simple experiment. Tickle one person in the ribs and he will lose all control of himself and writhe in paroxysms. Tickle another person in precisely the same manner and he will turn a glassy eye upon you. Tickle yourself and the experiment is devoid of sensation, yet suffer another to tickle you and you will shout with laughter. Why? And it is just as difficult to answer the whys arising from a discussion of stage comedy.

There was a speech in Francis Wilson's play "When Knights Were Bold" that told the whole story:

"Oh, my noble lords and ladies,
Jesting isn't a joke."

The millionaire who has enjoyed every advantage of education and culture, who has seen everything that travel may offer and who might be expected to be both blasé and sophisticated, may laugh himself into hysterics over the antics of a slapstick comedian, while his studious, serious minded clerk is bored and can only get a laugh out of Sheridan's keenest shaft of wit or Shaw's polite pleasantries. Which brings home the fact that it is the audience and not the actor that contributes most to the evening's entertainment. There are three fundamental types of comedy underlying all stage entertainment—the pungent, the oily and the unctuous acrobatic. I should say that Al Jolson typifies the former and also that his treatment is the most daring. Comedians of his school frankly tell their audiences that they are irresistibly funny and carry the audiences with them throughout the evening. I should say that Charles Chaplin typifies the unctuous acrobatic comedian, whose keynote is surprise. I belong to quite a different school of comedy. I recognize the fact that I am lazy. But the people that laugh with me are lazy too.

As I understand comedy, the people who laugh with me do not want to be disturbed. They accept the character as I do—a sincere old bird, this *Magistrate* in "Good Morning, Judge." He is bubbling over with exuberance, but he does not fully recognize it, and the caution incident to his station stops him. He is a hypocrite, but only to the extent that we are all hypocrites. He is fooling himself and that is why he is funny. He is real in fooling himself, just as real as you are when you say to yourself, "I'll take a drink; I don't want it, but I feel a pain."

His wild young stepson recognizes a truth and expresses it bluntly when he says: "You're a sporty boy, but you don't know it." Therein lurks the comedy. To be funny the character must be played with sincerity, the character carrying the audience with him through a perfectly logical combination of circumstances into a situation that is a living horror to him. That it is a horror to him, that he has walked into the situation led by a child and fooling himself all the time is the very essence of lazy, oily comedy, and the climax is reached when he commences to realize the situation in the court scene. Its horror sweeps him out of all semblance of reason or mentality; he gropes with a suffocating cloud of fact and succumbs to it. He "goes out" strangling, and in the moment that he collapses the height of comedy is reached. One smile would utterly ruin the situation, but when he struggles for air and falls, flopping like a fish out of water, the audience shrieks with laughter. The audience is sympathetic; it has placed itself in his position and therefore the audience is in hysterics of laughter.

It may be said that this method of earning a laugh is crude. So it is—just as crude as the oil painting of a mother bending over a child in the cradle. Seen at the proper distance, under the proper lights and with the benefit of a shadow box the painting brings tears to the eye of the beholder, but scrutinized at a distance of a few feet it is a blotch. The comedian handles a given subject in a broad way, taking full advantage of toning, lights, music, &c., and if he carries his audience with him he sweeps them off their feet with merriment. He knows he is acting as no person in real life would, but therein lies the foundation for his laughs—the unreal, the unexpected, with a shadow box of the real provided by the sincerity of his acting. *Judge Meebles* in "Good Morning, Judge" is an innocuous old fossil, who has outlived all the wild oats days, has been surrounded by influences

RUTH HARRINGTON
IN "TUMBLE IN"

that curb such inclinations and is as innocent as a lamb. He has no idea that the spirit of adventure burns within him until the boy puts it in his mind that he is a perfect young devil repressing his natural instinct and he starts out to live up to that idea. Of course he is accelerated in this by a suggestion of jealousy and the thought that his wife is rather rubbing it in a bit. So he starts on a course that he knows is wrong, that the audience knows is wrong and that the audience knows that he knows is wrong. Values are the making of romance and drama; the antitheses of values are the making of comedy, and here is a splendid example. He does just what he should not do, in precisely the way he should not do it, sincerely, complacently and with the conviction that with his lofty motives he can do no wrong. And the answer is laughter.

I went on the stage because I was a bad farmer. I have never made a particular study of comedy; in fact what I know of comedy was gained in studying values for legitimate drama and applying the principle of the antithesis for comedy situations. My father sent me out to Australia from England to farm. I was too lazy to succeed, but in time I found that my laziness was a valuable asset in planting comedy with equally lazy audiences through suggestion and induction. However physically lazy the comedy audience may be, it is mentally alert. So long as a comedian of my type stays honestly within his character, the comedy situations he suggests by implication or innuendo will be seized upon by the audience and developed, expanded and materialized into laughter. The audience does it—not me, nor any comedian of my type. The Jolson type of comedian and the Chaplin type of comedian boldly hands his wares to his audience and says enjoy them with me. That is a test my variety of comedy would not stand; we have to suggest that there is a laugh concealed if the audience can find it and then start out to make it as difficult as possible for them to do so unless carried on the wings of their own imagination. The situation they actually see is not funny, but the situation and the circumstances and conditions that their alert mentality has created are! So, we are as far as ever from a definition of comedy. It is a trying bore to one man and a joy to another—something very pert and smart and new to the sophisticated and something old and familiar and therefore dear to the more sophisticated.

Visit a burlesque performance, for instance, and you will find the oldest of high class farce dusted off and utilized in a sort of an up-to-date way. Go around the corner to the highest priced musical comedy and you will find the burlesque idea presented with a new twist. Cross the street and you will see a sparkling comedian delighting throngs with sheer nonsense that emanates from within himself and which must be analyzed as personality, or nothing, and then there is my class or type of comedian who reflects a laugh from the carefully worked out material with which he has been provided. When we are all through we will have to come back to my original proposition that the laugh is too nebulous to analyze—that it is the contribution of the audience rather than of the actor, regardless of the medium employed to bring it out.

Miss Susanne Caubet, goddaughter of Sarah Bernhardt, will make her appearance at the Century Midnight Whirl on Monday night. Her father was a well known French actor. She began her theatrical career at the age of 8. In her performance here she will sing French and American songs.

BERTEE BEAUMONTE, THE KICKER.

BERTEE BEAUMONTE, who bloomed forth as a particularly able eccentric dancer in "The Lady in Red" at the Lyric Theatre last week, is but another example of the advantages of artists not coming to New York in a musical production until they have mastered their calling. This feat Bertee Beaumonte has done in a particularly able manner. Had the local theatregoer witnessed the development of the kicks and gyrations of this clever performer they would not now seem so astonishing. The amazing thing of this young girl's terpsichorean tricks is that some rival performer who has seen her in musical shows in the West and in vaudeville has not come forth with an imitation and thus destroyed the full effectiveness of her particular gifts, and tricks. We have had lots of kickers on the New York stage, but this newcomer to musical comedy quite outdoes them all in variety, and therein lies the novelty. While garbed as Cleopatra this agile young person kicked in more directions than any kicker seen in these parts in many a day. Miss Beaumonte's Cleopatra double back kick was devised particularly for this number and is not likely to be very extensively copied, for it would require a most able and efficient all around kicker to give even a faint imitation of it.

ESTHER INGHAM
IN "LISTEN LESTER"

The fact is that Bertee Beaumonte has been preparing for her New York debut for a dozen years. When she was 16 years old she left her home in Memphis, Tenn., and joined the chorus of "The Spring Chicken," in which Richard Carle was playing. Miss Beaumonte by ardent study and practise developed a proficiency in dancing that soon secured her a position among the principals. So it was, ten years ago, she was able to secure the role of the French girl in "The Broken Idol," in which Otis Harlan was starring in Chicago. Her singing and dancing proved so effective in this piece that she remained with it for two years, during its long run in Chicago and its tour in the West. Then when "Miss Nobody from Nowhere" was staged at the Princess Theatre in Chicago Miss Beaumonte was chosen for the young Italian girl. She remained with this piece during its two years' run. When "The Modern Eve" was put on in Chicago and Adele Roland gave up the part of the woman doctor Bertee Beaumonte was engaged to take her place. She continued in this play in Miss Roland's role for two seasons. Then, seven years ago, Miss Beaumonte went into vaudeville, and has continued from year to year in that field up to the time of her engagement for "The Lady in Red." During those seven years in vaudeville Miss Beaumonte has been appearing in two sketches, one called "The Doctorine" and the other "The Sargentine."

SHE HAS A THEORY.

DIANTHA PATTISON, who plays the girl in society who permits a college graduate serving as a butler to woo her in "I Love You" at the Booth Theatre, has some very definite ideas as to why *Brooks*, though a college man, chances to be filling such a strange position.

"It isn't such a paradox as many persons imagine," says Miss Pattison. "*Brooks*, as played by Gilbert Douglas, is only an instance of a timid man taking his ability to the wrong market. There are hundreds of such cases and thousands of such men, though not all of them, to be sure, are butlers.

"This sort of thing is caused by timidity. Men and women simply are afraid to hunt the right market for the kind of brains or temperament nature has given them.

"They are afraid of overstocking the market, which is all wrong, and take what they can get instead of seeking the work they like. They are always more buyers than sellers—that's one reason why a peddler always becomes rich. He trots around all over the land hunting buyers at their doors, running them down, dodging a missile at this gate, fending off a dog at the next, fleeing from a housewife's wrathful voice at the next and unloading his wares at the fourth.

"The dog and the hostile stone, and the ire of the busy man or woman who will have none of you—these things are all in the plant. You count on these incidents—at least you do if you know your business. If you don't they will count on you. They may, anyhow.

"Why, just look at the things that people buy—buy, and pay good money for. Look at the books people buy. And what is marvellous beyond the range of wonder, look at the books they read! And the stories and poetry in magazines which the editors, ordinarily sensible men, buy and pay for.

"You can write better ones; so can I—have done it lots of times. It's the same way with men and women. They take their abilities to the wrong market or get discouraged and quit trying to sell them when the very next effort might have landed them in just the work they were qualified to perform.

"This is what *Brooks* did, though he was a graduate of both Harvard and Oxford. There are many such instances in everyday life."

ELISE BARTLETT
IN "PLEASE GET MARRIED"

A CYCLE OF COLLABORATION.

The marked favor which David Belasco's production of "Dark Rosaleen," the new comedy of Irish life by W. D. Hepenstall and Whitford Kane, is enjoying in the Belasco Theatre, where it is now in its second month, recalls the fact that six of the many notable successes that this house has had during the eleven and a half years of its existence have been the result of collaboration.

It was with David Warfield in "The Grand Army Man" that the Belasco, then called the Stuyvesant, was first opened to the public. This play was the work of Pauline Phelps and Marion Short, but was partly rewritten by Mr. Belasco. As *Wes Bigelow*, a veteran of the Grand Army of the Republic, whose affection for the son of a deceased comrade formed the greatest thing in his life, through his having loved the boy's mother in his youth, Mr. Warfield gave one of the finest performances of his career, and the cast also included William Elliott as the boy, Marie Bates, who has been associated with Mr. Warfield in all his plays, and also Taylor Holmes and Jane Cowl, each of whom have since risen to stardom.

In "Years of Discretion" Mr. Belasco offered the first of the many comedies by Frederick and Fanny Hatton, which have since seen the light, the authors treating in a richly humorous manner the theme of the elderly parent who adopted the semblance of a gay, young woman only to weary of it soon and go back to the ease and comfort of home with the man she marries, having found his tastes similar to

MILDRED LA GUE
IN "SOMETIME"

hers. The role of the widow was charmingly played by Effie Shannon, and also prominent in the cast were Bruce McRae, now in Mr. Belasco's production of "Daddies" at the Lyceum Theatre, Grant Mitchell, who has forged so rapidly to the front as a comedian, and the late Herbert Kelcey.

Four seasons ago Mr. Belasco produced "The Boomerang," by Winchell Smith and Victor Mapes, which has taken its place as one of the most successful comedies ever staged. After crowding the Belasco Theatre for 522 consecutive performances it was sent on tour and has broken records in all the principal cities and is still playing to crowded houses everywhere.

"Little Lady in Blue," in which Frances Starr showed that she was equally at home in comedy as in the heavier roles which have fallen to her lot, was written by two English actors, Horace Hodges and T. Wigney Percyval. With its story laid in the Georgian days the charm of the piece was unusually pronounced and in the title role Miss Starr added another to her remarkable gallery of stage portraits.

Last season Mr. Belasco offered George Middleton and Guy Bolton's comedy "Polly With a Past," with Ina Claire in the title role, this being the first part she played upon the legitimate stage. Her success more than justified his confidence and after a ten months' run at the Belasco the play was presented last summer on the Pacific Coast and this season in all the principal cities of the country.

Now "Dark Rosaleen" gives every promise of repeating the success enjoyed by the previous efforts of collaboration presented in the Belasco.

Stuart Walker has opened his summer of repertory at the Murat Theatre in Indianapolis with a production of "The Cinderella Man." This is Mr. Walker's third season in the Indiana capital and a brilliant and enthusiastic audience welcomed the organization with proprietary pride. Ovations there were—not only for Mr. Walker, for George Gaul, who played the leading role in the opening bill, and for other favorite players—but also for the fine ensemble work of the company. Local reviewers pointed out that Mr. Walker's repertory company is unique in America—the members of his company have been with him the three years which embrace his career as producer. Special scenery is built for all plays, whether new or revivals. The lighting is a special feature and all details of the production are as carefully carried out as they are for long runs in New York.

Mr. Walker has a company including actors known in New York. George Gaul and Margaret Mower appeared in the opening bill, with McKay Morris promised for the second week and Gregory Kelly, J. M. Kerrigan, Lillian Ross, Ruth Gordon, Judith Lowry and Beatrice Maude to appear in July. The company also includes Elizabeth Patterson, Edgar Stehli and Aldrich Bowker, remembered for excellent characterizations during Mr. Walker's recent Portmanteau season, as well as Morgan Farley, George Somnes, Robert McGroarty, Elizabeth Black, Lael Davis, and later Ben Lyon, John Orr and Louis John Bart.

With such a company as this Mr. Walker can well contemplate "Kismet," "Peter Ibbetson," "The Darling of the Gods," which he announces as the more pretentious production of the season. There will also be "The Hawk," "Romance," "The Great Divide," "The Servant in the House," "Milestones," "The Tyranny of Tears," and plenty of summery comedies such as "Good Gracious Annabelle," "Here Comes the Bride," "Nothing But the Truth," "Fair and Warmer," "The Show Shop" and "The Fortune Hunter."

FAY BAINTER
in "East is West"

BROOKLYN VARIETY.

NEW BRIGHTON — With three headline acts, consisting of Belle Baker, Frisco and Amelia Stone and Arman Kaliz, the management can hardly express themselves, except to say they think the golden age of vaudeville is coming, not far from the ocean. The Stone-Kaliz musical fantasy, "Romance," is said to be the only sketch on which Edgar Allan Woolf has worked in a year, for he is now turning his powers full force on Broadway. Tim Toney and Ann Norman offer a skit with the title, "You Know What I Mean," said to be on every one's tongue.

ORPHEUM — The Twenty-seventh Division Players in "Putting It Over" will make the house rock with their girlish barytones. Will M. Cressy and Blanche Dayne of the Over There Theatre League, allowed to march away from France with the full honors of war, will invite the public to remember them with "The Man Who Remembered." The "Creole Fashion Plate" will do its part to make Brooklyn the home of styles, in competition with Paris.

STAR—As it is now unquestionably summer, "The Follies of Pleasure" will enable burlesque to have its season of "Follies." Clyde J. Bates, Charlotte Worth, Violet Hilson and Tom McKenna are among the rough diamonds in the company.

SUMMER RESORTS.

LUNA PARK — "The Last Shot," the new spectacle of the war's final gasp, which started to reverberate here on Memorial Day, has not been allowed to die down, for the management still has plenty of money to buy ammunition for numerous last shots, even after presenting roller coasters, chutes and vaudeville acts to the public at practically less than cost.

STEEPLECHASE PARK — New bathing suits to the number of 25,000 are only one of the thrills connected with this place. The steeplechase horses still show no sign of wear and tear from a hard life.

PALISADES PARK—Several new rides here are admirably calculated to cool off the visitor at the same time that they take away his breath.

THE BED SPRINGS OF TRUTH.

Samuel Hoffenstein, who occupies much the same position in the A. H. Woods publicity offices that Rudyard Kipling does in English poetry today, not only sounds a new note in the poetry of West Forty-second street, but throws some hitherto unsuspected light on the origin of Ostermoor farce in the following lyric, chastely entitled "The Tenant, the Playwright and the Bed":

Upon the pavement cold and gray
The tenant sat one winter day;
He gazed around him mournfully
Upon his wretched family.
"Alas, alas!" the tenant said,
"Alas! I've been evica-ted;
Thrown out into the bitter cold,
And all my furniture been sold;
They've left me only this one bed,
Alas, alas!" the tenant said.

A famous playwright passed that way
And stopped upon the pavement gray
"Ah, why so sad?" the playwright said.
"Alas, I been evica-ted
And thrown into the bitter cold,
And all my furniture's been sold,
And all the landlord's left to me
Is this one ancient bed you see."

"Cheer up, cheer up," the playwright said.
"Although you've been evica-ted,
Cheer up, the worst is yet to came,
You'll yet be known to Wealth and Fame.
Around this bed we'll write a play,
That stands upon the pavement gray,
A hit to fill your foes with gloom,
As big as 'Up in Mabel's Room.'"

A few days passed, the play was wrote,
Its triumph got the landlord's goat.
"Come back," he to the tenant said,
"No more you'll be evica-ted."
The tenant thus his foe defied—
"Never again!" he fiercely cried.
"Evic-et all your foes," he said,
"And leave them but a single bed
To stand upon the pavement gray
And furnish playwrights with a play."

Vaudeville and Burlesque.

PALACE — Gertrude Hoffmann, having learned practically all there is to know as a dancer, is now devoting herself seriously to trap drumming, and besides presenting new momentous dances in her elaborate headline act this week, she will bounce into the augmented orchestra and keep her muscles limber with a bout at the drums. Emma Carus will also engage in a contest, challenging any one at large to outdo her as the happiest comedienne on earth. J. Francis Dooley and Corinne Sales have reserved a place on the programme for themselves in "Will Yer, Jim?' Harriet Rempel and company, having the sketch position of honor on the programme with "Tarrytown," by Tom Barry, have been ordered to hold on at all costs.

RIVERSIDE—Outside of the fact that Irene Franklin and Burton Greene will come to the surface in vaudeville again with their songs, Harry Watson, Jr., will fight with his face as "Young Kid Battling Dugan"; Kate Elinore and Sam Williams will sponsor scream after scream with "A Reel of Real Fun," and half a dozen other acts will stimulate enthusiasm for the news pictorial, there is practically nothing to report here.

AMERICAN—"Full of Pep," Marty Brooks's tabloid musical comedy, with eight beauties guaranteed to be the last word since Helen of Troy; King and Hervey, who can be funny by the week; Wheeler and Potter, entirely surrounded by laughter in "A Phoney Episode," and other acts will form a substantial basis for the feature pictures.

COLUMBIA — Age cannot wither nor custom stale the infinite variety of Jean Bedini's "Peek-a-Boo," the Pike's Peak of burlesque.